



Let's Talk Chicken



*What one family discovered about
raising backyard chickens*

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In the Beginning

How we started raising backyard chickens

My wife, Britt, and I were just talking the other day about how bizarre it is that we've become chicken people. Not crazy, walking-around-with-feathers-in-our-hair-and-chicken-poop-on-our-clothes chicken people, but chicken-owning, chicken-loving chicken people. When we got married, we never would have dreamed of one day raising backyard chickens. But we really do love "The Ladies." Not only do they give us fresh eggs every day, but they really are fun to have as part of our family!



It all started a few years back. We'd had our vegetable garden for a year or two, so helping our daughters better understand where food comes from was a natural part of our family conversations. It had also been a couple of years since I had turned the proverbial leaf from being a sklog (our family word for a lazy person who effectively does nothing physical) to making exercise part of my daily routine. I was getting in shape, which meant that in addition to exercise, we were committing to better food choices. Needless to say, this resulted in eating a lot of eggs.

I really don't know how we actually decided to take the leap into chickendom, but before we knew it, I had the plans for the coop all drawn up. We envisioned that having chickens would further provide our daughters with a greater understanding and appreciation for where food comes from, as well as require our sweet little bow-headed, suburban girls to get a little dirt under their fingernails and have a bit more responsibility around the home. As a dad trying to raise capable, independent, young women, these were good things. And I knew it would come with a few other dynamics, too,



because chickens would die along the way and we'd be able to discuss the important issues of life and death with our children.

And then there was something bigger—something overarching—our family story. We wanted the story told in our home to be something uniquely us. Something interesting. Something that would build into our hearts, our minds, and our memories. We felt chickens would help do that.

All that to say that when we first started raising backyard chickens, we really knew next to nothing about the actual raising part. We knew what we wanted to get out of raising chickens, but beyond my vast experience at raising parakeets as a kid (which didn't help much at all, not surprisingly), we didn't have a clue.

Now, after having a whopping 3 years of experience as a “chicken farmer,” I have learned a few interesting things about raising chickens that have allowed me to hold the floor a few times at dinner parties. From chicken care, to farm fresh eggs, to coop creation this little e-book will give you the rundown from the Scott Family perspective.



4 Truths About Raising Chickens

All the interesting stuff you may not know



There are a number of things we've learned along the way about caring for chickens that I thought you'd appreciate knowing before you got home with your box of fluffy yellow chicks.



Truth #1: You don't need a rooster to have farm fresh eggs.

This is definitely the fact that has gotten the biggest reaction when I've had a willing audience. [Warning: I'm probably about to cross the line of appropriate sharing for some of you, but for reasons of education, I must.] Yes, to get fertilized eggs, you need a rooster. But to get regular ol' eggs, all you need is a hen. You see, like humans and other animals, hens ovulate. As part of their natural ovulation process—which occurs something like every 25-26 hours depending on breed and time of

year—they pass (i.e., “lay”) their eggs. The only time these eggs will actually produce chicks is when they've been fertilized by a rooster. This means that if you don't have a rooster, you'll end up with plenty of eggs, but no baby chicks. Once you think about it, it's simple biology really.

Truth #2: Chickens won't disturb your neighbors.

Now this won't be true if you have a rooster. Roosters don't just crow in the morning; they crow whenever they want to throughout the day. This is why local ordinances, particularly in residential areas, limit the number of roosters you can have, or in most cases, won't allow them at all. They are considered too loud (for obvious reasons,



if you've ever been close to one when he has crowed). And now that you know that roosters aren't required for hens to lay eggs, most backyard chicken folks are good without one, as are their neighbors.

For us Scotts, our seven hens aren't noisy at all, and in fact, they're a lot quieter than our neighbors' dogs! Beyond hearing a few loud clucks when they are laying their eggs or when they are alarmed while free-ranging, you would really never know we had chickens. When you get close to their coop you can hear them clucking or making muffled bawking or cooing sounds, but we actually find those sounds quite pleasant.

Truth #3: Chickens are not that difficult to take care of.

This interesting thing is more of an opinion. Care of your chickens is definitely required, but we have found they don't actually require too much from us. That said, in order to minimize the amount of work required to raise chickens, you need to think through the living requirements of your flock (see Interesting Fact #4).

Perhaps the best thing about chickens is that it's really easy to find friends or neighbors to check on your chickens when you go out of town, largely because you can pay them in fresh eggs! And all they really have to do is "check" on them – i.e., make sure they have food and clean water. They don't need to be walked or anything else, so it really just takes a few quick minutes to stop by for chicken-sitting. Although, because chickens are quite entertaining they will probably stay longer. We often will get pictures texted to us of our fleshy friends playing with our feathered friends.

Truth #4: The coop really matters.

Essentially all chickens do is eat, poop, scratch, drink, preen, take dirt baths, and poop some more. These realities are important to consider when determining the location and design of your chicken coop.



Your coop should be convenient enough for you to get to fairly often (at least once daily) to check on their food and water and to retrieve your eggs. Near your coop you should have easy access to their food, a water source, and any other chicken-related supplies and coop-cleaning tools. You also should think through how and where you will dispose of all the chicken poop and the old pine shavings (or whatever you put on the coop floor and in the nesting boxes). A compost pile is a great option.

When designing the coop itself, you need to have easy access to the entire structure to clean it out. Although many of my chicken-raising compatriots clean their coops on a more regular basis (daily or weekly), I probably only do a real thorough cleaning about once every 3-4 months—and it only takes about an hour. When you've had times of extended rain, you'll need to clean it out more often to control for smells (i.e., chicken poop doesn't dry out and blow away as quickly).

Also from a coop design perspective, to make it easier to grab your eggs I would suggest that you're able to access them from the outside. Honestly speaking, you don't want to have to enter the coop every time you want to get your eggs. It can be a bit messy—remember they poop all day long!

I really get into the nitty gritty of coop design in the bonus section, so if you're serious about what all this might look like, stay tuned.



There are a ton of other things I could share about raising chickens, and perhaps I will in future e-books, but this is where I'll stop for now.



All About Eggs

Isn't that what this hokey pokey is all about?



Truth #1: There is such a thing as green eggs.

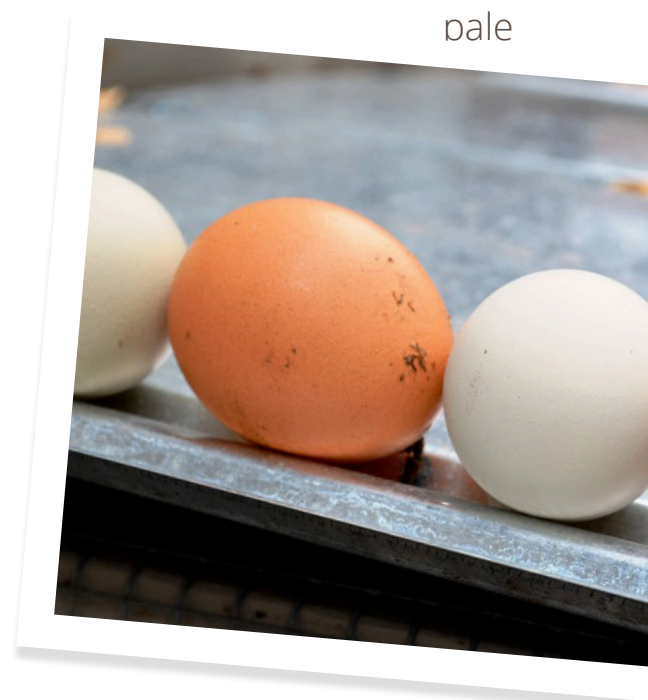
Yes, there is such a thing as green eggs—and blue eggs and olive eggs and chocolate brown eggs. The color of the egg's shell simply depends on the breed of the chicken that laid it. Then, within the breed, there may be some variation on that color by a specific chicken, but that chicken will lay fairly consistent-looking eggs over the course of its life.

We have three breeds of chickens: **Barred Plymouth Rock; Easter Egger; and Golden Comet** (which is actually not a breed, but what is called a sexlink hybrid). So we effectively get eggs of three different colors.

Our Barred Plymouth Rocks (Henny and Polly) lay brown, almost pink eggs.

Our Easter Eggers (Marigold and Hazel) lay pale green eggs. Easter Eggers have not been recognized as an official breed, but they are one of the most popular chickens to have in a backyard flock due to their unusual colored eggs. Although ours lay minty green eggs, other Easter Eggers may lay darker green, blue, or dark olive eggs.

Our Golden Comets (Ginger, Mayzie, and Mera-beth) lay brown eggs similar to the color you would find in brown eggs you buy from the store.



The color of an egg's yolk may vary slightly depending on the chickens' diet, but it'll always stay in the yellow to orange range. If you feed your chickens feed made up of more or less colorless corn and other grains and fillers, their yolks will be pale yellow, but if you let your chickens free-range, where they have access to proteins and plants that have brighter or darker pigments, their yolks will be bright yellow to almost orange.

Truth #2: You don't have to wash farm fresh eggs.

Here's another biology lesson for you that didn't come from a textbook. If you've never retrieved an egg from a hen house, you may not realize (or may not want to think about the fact that) the egg is very likely not sitting there all shiny and clean. Very often there are pine shavings, feathers, and chicken poop stuck to the shell, so your natural tendency would be to wash them immediately. Don't do it. If you do, you're actually creating a greater potential health hazard.

So here's the biology lesson: The hard outer shell of an egg is actually a semi-permeable membrane, which means that air and moisture can pass through its pores. To protect the egg from bacteria and fine particles getting through the porous shell, the egg gets a thin outer coating called a "bloom" as it passes through the hen's "vent" (I'll let you guess what that's referring to). By washing your egg, you are removing this protective coating; thereby increasing the chances of bacteria entering the egg—which isn't a good thing.

So what's my personal practice? If the egg is at least relatively clean, I do nothing. If it has something stuck to it, I try to pick or flick it off. But if it is covered in manure, I do wash it in warm water (not cold water, because that actually increases the chances of bacteria entering the shell even more).



Truth #3: You don't really have to refrigerate them, either.

Now this leads to the question of refrigeration. Culturally, we (as in, citizens of the United States) have become accustomed to refrigerating our eggs. This is because the USDA requires eggs to be power-washed before they can be sold in stores, which as we learned above, removes the protective bloom. Without the protective bloom the eggs need to be refrigerated, otherwise they would go bad quickly.

But if you don't wash your eggs, you don't wash off the bloom, and your eggs can actually stay on your counter at room temperature for a couple of weeks (or months).

Here's my personal practice: I'm a belt and suspenders kind of guy. I don't wash my eggs unless manure is caked on it. But I also refrigerate them, because I'm still brain-washed by our former way of doing things. Sometimes I'll leave them in a basket on the counter for the day because I think it looks cool. We've also looked into buying an egg skelter—this cool egg ramp deal that stores your eggs in chronological order. Maybe then we'll leave them out longer.



Is Raising Chickens for You?

This is the part where we answer all those FAQs.

My first recommendation is that you consider both your objectives and your limitations for raising chickens.

Before you run out and buy yourself some chickens and think you can figure everything else out once you get home with your new, feathered friends—STOP. Chickens are not an impulse buy. You need to really think about it.

We love our chickens, but they aren't for everyone.

So before you get started, do your research. Talk to people you know who have had chickens for more than two weeks, and consider both the financial investment and commitment of time. The chickens themselves are not expensive, but the upfront investment for a coop and all else involved can be. And, although certain aspects of raising chickens are easier than you'd think, there are other aspects you probably haven't even thought about. Regardless, they are a commitment, so be smart about it. Think before you jump.

To do this, I recommend you make a few lists. First, you should make a list of what your objectives are for raising chickens. If it's just for the fresh eggs or because you think others will think you're cool, I'd recommend that you just buy organic eggs and that you start walking with more of a swagger. Raising chickens for these reasons is probably not sustainable.



The next thing you should consider is the scale of your mini-chicken farm. Start by asking yourself the following questions, then consider the information I provided and whatever other information you found during your research.

How many chickens can I have?

This varies by where you live. Particularly when starting out, you'll want to do your research to better understand the conditions and restrictions for raising chickens provided by your HOA, county, or other jurisdictions.

Odds are, if you live in an urban setting, you probably can't have a rooster. But as we've already discussed, roosters aren't needed to produce eggs. Hens can get the job done on their own.

How many chickens should I get? How much space do they need?

One chicken needs a minimum of four square feet of space in the coop. So, a flock of six chickens needs a coop with 24 square feet of space. Then they will also need at least that amount of space in a run, outside of the coop, to get fresh air.

We knew we were limited to seven hens, given county restrictions and the size of our property. Although we started out with five, we knew that we'd want to max it out at some point, so my design took that into consideration. And I like odd numbers.

You can also ask yourself, "How many eggs do I want?" and then back into the number of hens you'll need: Depending on the breed, hens will lay eggs fairly well from the time that they are five or six months old until they are five to seven years old. Then they'll slow down quite considerably and live for another three to five years. A good egg layer will lay six eggs per week during their prime egg-laying years, but will slow down a bit during the colder months of the year. The average hen will lay more like three or four eggs per week.



How much does it cost?

The cost for raising chickens is really on the front end as you construct your coop and buy all the supplies and other chicken paraphernalia. A coop can run anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on your style and what you're looking for.

After that, monthly expenses are minimal. I spend only about \$15 a month on chicken feed for our seven hens, and then \$5 every two or three months on pine shavings for the bottom of the coop. I'm sure there's the occasional other expense, but that's really all that comes up on a monthly/semi-monthly basis. I will say that our food costs are probably low because we feed them every bit of our table scraps (with a few exceptions) and they eat it all. We also free-range them in our yard 3-5 days a week for about 4 hours a day.

Are there any special accommodations for cold weather?

In a nutshell, it is not as much of an issue as you would think. The thing you need to watch out for is the low temperature, not really the ice or snow—at least not with the amount of ice and snow we get here in Atlanta. The most important thing is making sure that their water stays, well, water, and doesn't become undrinkable ice. You can either go back and forth throughout the day cracking the ice and/or refreshing their water, OR, if your coop has electricity, you can use water warmers to keep the water from freezing. Since our winters don't get that cold that often, I just go back and forth on those few persistently cold days.

As far as the chickens keeping themselves warm during lower temperatures, for most that's really a non-issue. Just consider the fact that little sparrows survive winters just fine. The critical thing here is that your chickens have been able to adapt to the colder temperature as the days get colder. That's why some say you shouldn't use a heat lamp to keep your coop warm. Their thinking is that if something were to happen to the heat source (e.g., the electricity goes out), then you would be putting your



chickens at risk, because their bodies had not had the time to adjust to the cold (i.e., through appropriate feather production).

One other thing you need to do, especially in the colder areas of the country, is to watch out for their exposed skin, particularly those chicken breeds with larger combs. If it's too windy and too cold for too long, they could get frostbite. There are a couple of things you can do to prevent this: In the same way you would protect your lips, rub a little bit of Vaseline on their combs and/or make sure that your chickens have a place to get out of the wind. Again, since we don't have very cold winters here in Atlanta, I haven't concerned myself too much with this. However, because our coop is essentially open to the elements on one side with large windows on the other sides, Britt and I quickly fashioned curtains (almost like Roman shades) to keep the wind out when it starts to get into the 20s.

This is not an exhaustive list of things you need to consider when "winterizing" your chickens, but these are probably two of the most important.

What about predators?

This is another great question and one that I worried about quite a bit. I'd like to say that we haven't had any problems with predators, but that's not the case. However, the predators I worried about most have not been the predators we've had a problem with.

We live between two streams and in front of a dried up pond, both of which are draws for coyotes. Ever since we've lived here, we've heard and seen quite a few coyotes, so when we got our chickens I was certain that we would have a pack of coyotes licking their chops every day just outside our fence. But that hasn't been the case. Actually, it seems we've seen and heard fewer coyotes. We're not really certain why.

On the other hand we have had one incident with what we believe was a raccoon or feral cat. Fairly early on in our chicken adventure, I started allowing my flock to free-



range in our backyard whether I was home or not. One rainy day I was away from home for a few hours and came home to a brutal scene. It looked like someone had gutted a feather pillow in front of the coop. Four of my six chickens at the time were cowering in the corner of the coop, but the other 2 had been killed—one was lying just outside the coop and the other was wedged between the pickets of our fence. Their bodies were fully intact, but their heads had been eaten. (Sorry to be graphic, but that's all part of having chickens. You have to be ready to deal with and have discussions about life and death with your kids—a good thing I think). Anyway, we believe that they were killed by something smaller, like a raccoon, possum, or feral cat - otherwise all of the chickens would likely have been eaten.

The lessons learned (for us at least):

1. Only let the chickens free-range when someone is at home and aware that they are outside.
2. Don't let them free-range when it's overcast/rainy. It is my belief that on overcast and rainy days, those smaller varmints are out and about more...AND with the sounds of the dripping rain, the chickens' awareness of what's around them is hindered.

I know I'm being really cautious with both of these "lessons." Most chicken-folk probably let their chickens free-range whenever, but this is how I'm trying to keep my flock safe.

I have also noticed a few times that something small has tried to dig into the coop at night, but we constructed it and the run in such a way that nothing could get in. They are sunk about a foot into the ground with hardware cloth laid at that level so that nothing could dig under and then back up.

I'm certain we'll have other run-ins with predators, so it's important that we continue to keep a watchful eye on our little ladies.



Give Me the Cliff Notes

What are the pros and cons?

We really have enjoyed having our feathered friends. For us, mostly because of the fancy coop we chose to build, our daughters will already be in college or beyond before we'll break even from a cost perspective—but we didn't get chickens for a potential financial gain. As we discovered along the way, there are many bonuses to raising chickens.

- Clearly, we love eating and sharing our daily farm fresh eggs.
- They come running whenever we approach the coop. Of course this is because they have small brains and think we have something to feed them. Which we usually do. But it's still pretty endearing.
- Each of them really does have a unique personality—some are goofy, some personable, others standoff-ish and guarded, most are curious, some more active than others—and once their pecking order is established, they all play well together like a big feathered family.
- They eat all of our scraps. Seriously, we scrape everything into a composting canister that sits on our counter, and give it to them the next time I pay them a visit. (Actually, my daughters won't let me feed them eggs or chicken... something about cannibalism that grosses them out...but I still do when they're not looking!)
- When we go out of town, it's not tough to find someone to come and check on them. Again, who can pass up getting paid in free farm fresh eggs?!



All that said, you do need to be ready to take care of them. If you're the kind of person who likes futzing around in the yard and having one-sided conversations, you'll have a leg up, but they do require some work and a great deal of consideration.

- They basically eat, scratch, and poop all day long. (Sound familiar to some?) So with that, you'll have to do your fair share of feeding and cleaning.
- The feeding and watering isn't that bad, but you do have to do it every day, even when it's gross weather outside.
- Cleaning the coop really isn't that bad or that frequent—maybe once every couple of months—but when you clean it, it's pretty nasty, so the more comfortable you are with excrement (and lots of it) the better.
- If you let your chickens free range, be ready to clean up their poop and to straighten up your flowerbeds. While eating, they scratch at the ground (all day long), so your beds and sidewalks and paths are a bit untidy at the end the day.
- I've mentioned that one of the benefits we saw in owning chickens was the conversation it enabled us to have with our girls about life and death. The latter is important to be prepared for, because your chickens will die, and you do need to be ready to deal with loss. In addition to the two that were mauled by a predator, we've had another two die from a respiratory disease.

But all in all, we really do love our chickens and would highly recommend having them to someone who is ready to take care of them. **That's the Scott story. We'd love to hear yours.**



BONUS: Chicken Coop Design Considerations

The Scott Family Chicken Coop and Surrounding Area

I'm calling this the bonus section, because if you were just on a chicken fact-finding mission, this is going to be way too much info. That said, if you think you might really be on board for this adventure, I have much more to share on the topic of chicken coop design.

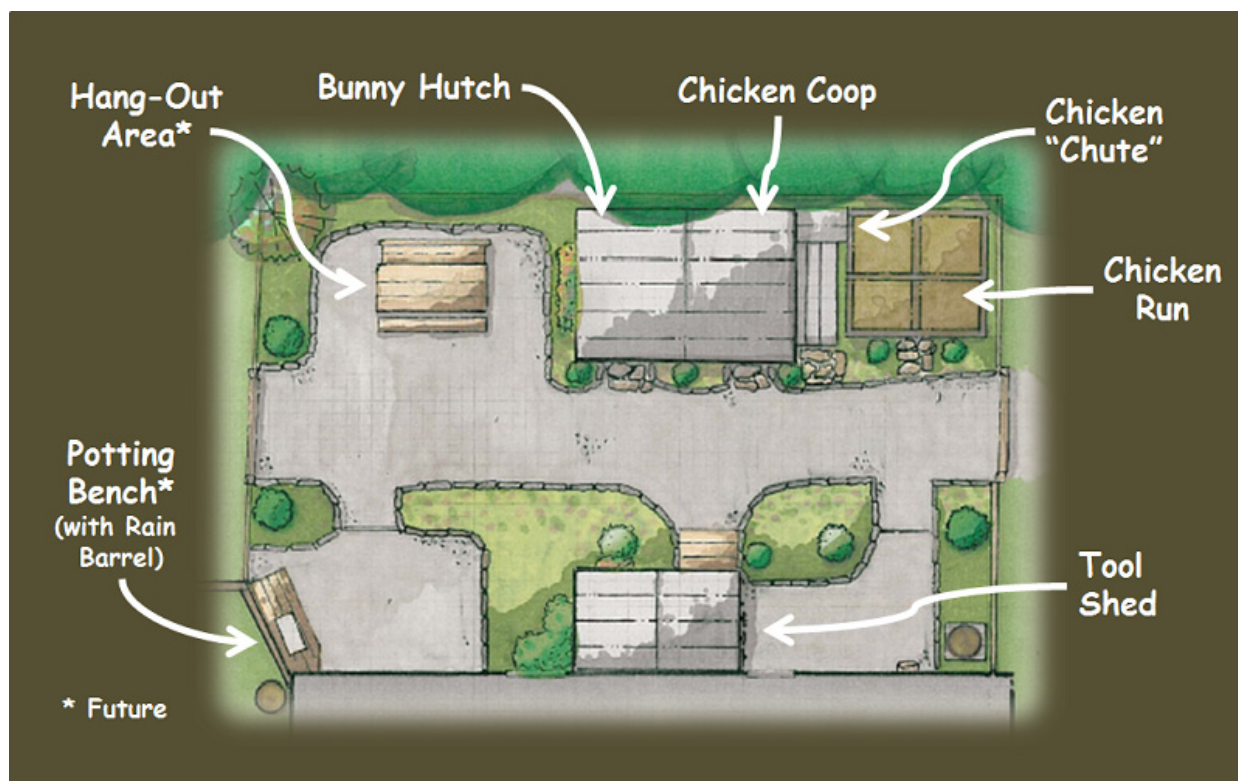
We realize that our chicken coop is not the average chicken coop, particularly in a suburban neighborhood. But when I sat down to design it, besides wanting to accomplish all the obvious functional objectives, I also wanted to make sure that the entire space that we created in our backyard was one that we would want to hang out in. We wanted it to not only go with the rest of our home and landscape style-wise, but that it also had a cozy feel—embracing the fact that it's not a very large space, about 25' x 35' total. My point is that you certainly don't have to go to the lengths we did and can still have a really cool, attractive space. You just have to be intentional about it.

A Bird's-Eye View of Scott Family Farm

The drawing below is a bird's-eye view of the entire "Scott Family Farm" (SFF) ...err, our side yard. You'll see that I've gone ahead and drawn both the current and future elements. Currently on SFF you'll find: the chicken coop/bunny hutch, chicken run, and tool shed. And this year, I hope to add a potting bench with a rain barrel and a dining/hangout area.

See diagram on next page...





Note: In order to cut down on the amount of mud and dirt that we'd have to walk through to get to the coop (and drag into the house), I've essentially covered the entire area with pea gravel. Having mostly rocks on the ground also made the space around the coop less attractive to the chickens to forage in and scratch up while they are free-ranging—essentially directing them to “greener pastures” in other areas of our yard. I've found that as long as you give your chickens a good deal of variety, they keep moving about and don't really decimate any one particular area.

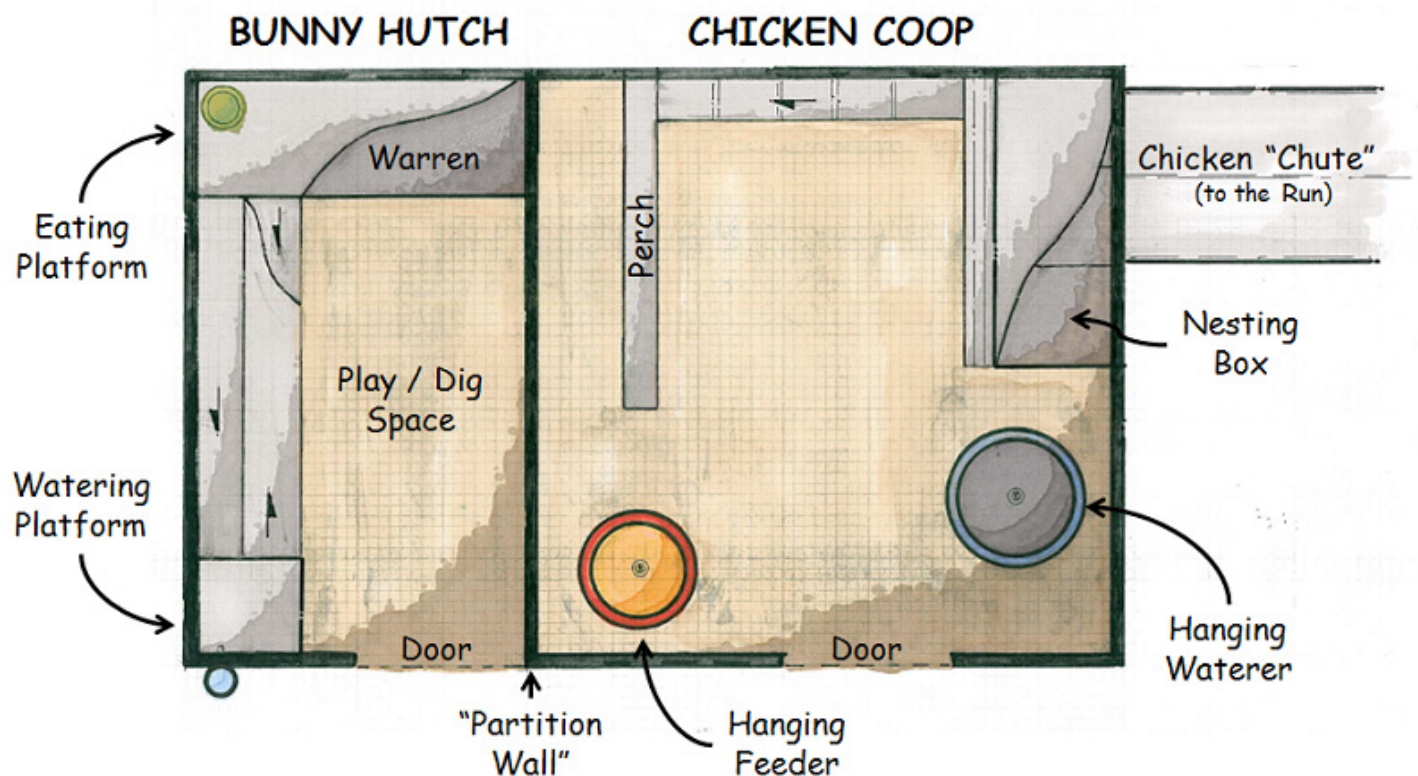
The photo below (*on the following page*) from SFF shows the area as it is now and indicates some of the primary functionality you'll want to include when considering a home for your chickens. Looking at this may also help you orient yourself while studying my drawings.





The Coop Floor Plan

Clearly I am not an architect, but hopefully this sketch will give you a good idea of our coop's floor plan.



Here's what you're looking at:

- The overall dimension is 7' x 11'.
- The structure is supported by a 6"x 6" post at each corner (sunk 2' into the ground, set in Quikrete), 2"x 8"s at the base, and 2"x 6"s at the top. The rest of the structure is made of 2"x 4"s.
- We chose to have a dirt foundation (i.e., no bottom vs. wood or concrete) with hardware cloth sunk 12"-18" down on all sides (the variation is a function of the slope we're dealing with on this spot) and then more hardware cloth laid across the bottom before it was back-filled with dirt—all to keep critters from digging in.
- The left third serves as the bunny hutch (or where we isolate sick hens, bringing our bunny to her inside hutch when we do); separated from the chicken area by a "partition wall" made of chicken wire attached to three 2"x4"s—bottom, middle, and top.
- The interior of the bunny hutch includes: a lounge/eating/creek-viewing platform at window level and the enclosed "warren" underneath; a watering platform; and a play/dig space on the bottom—all connected by a series of ramps.
- The other two-third serves as the chicken coop.
- The interior of the chicken coop includes: a nesting box enclosure (with three nesting boxes, although they only really use one at a time), which is raised off the ground about 18" so the chickens can have access to the "chicken chute" (see three bullet points below); a perch; a hanging feeder; and a hanging waterer.
- The roof is tin. To keep critters from climbing through the top of the coop (where 2"x4" rafters create a gap when resting on the walls), I simply added a board to box in the eave. I could have used wire instead, but I had extra wood and I thought wood would be easier to work with than either hardware cloth or chicken wire.
- The chicken coop is connected to the run by a 2'x 3' "chicken chute." There's a door that closes off the chute from the coop, but I have ended up keeping it open at all times.
- The separation created by the "chicken chute" (the area between the coop and



run) gives me ample room to get to that side of the coop: to retrieve our eggs through a hatch door that opens into the backside of the nesting box; to gain access through a door on the bottom half of the wall; and to look into the coop through a large window at the top of the wall. I used decking boards (painted the same color as the coop and run supports) as a walking platform—again, to minimize the amount of dirt we'd drag into the house.

- The chicken run (shown in the top drawing) is approximately 6'x 6' and is simply constructed of 2"x4"s, with 4"x 4" posts set in Quikrete at each corner. There is hardware cloth along the bottom half of the run walls (also sunk about 12" into the ground) and chicken wire around the top half of the walls and on the roof. I used hardware cloth on the bottom half to keep critters from digging in, but it's almost four times as expensive as chicken wire, so I used chicken wire everywhere else.

Front Elevation of the Coop

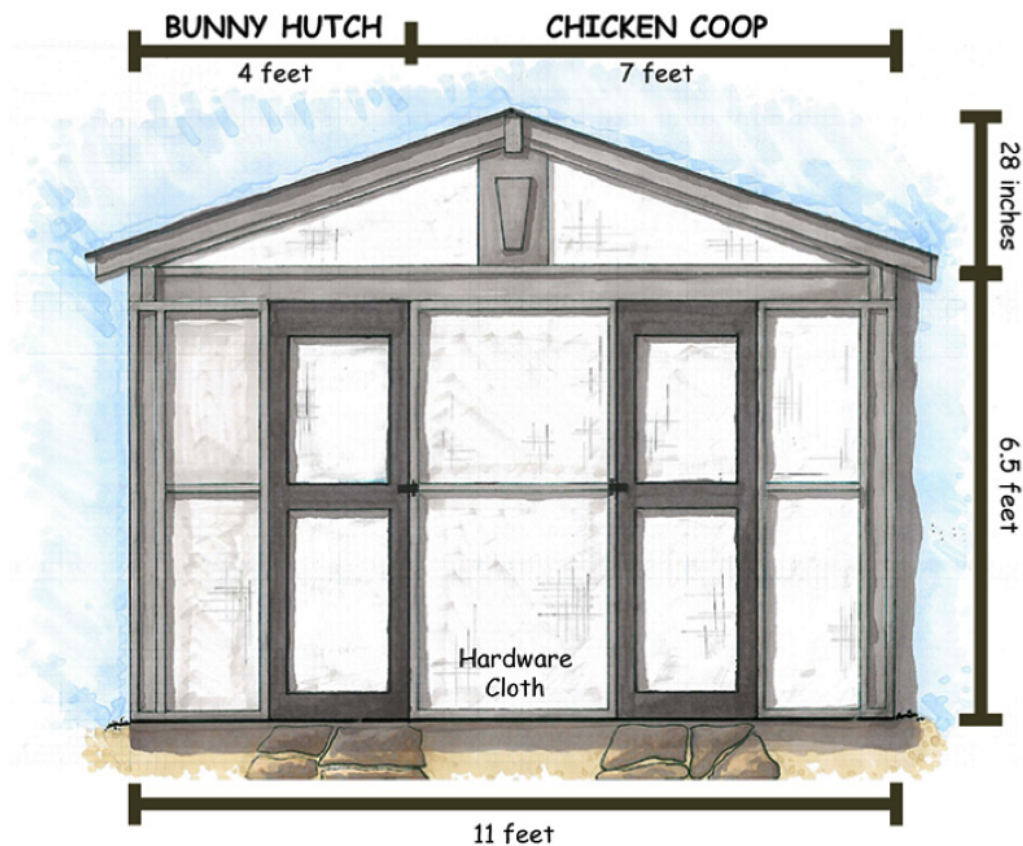
When designing your coop you really need to think through ventilation for a couple of reasons - primarily for the respiratory health of your chickens and to dry things out so that smells are kept to a minimum. I made ours super-ventilated by covering the entire front of our coop with hardware cloth. We may have gone overboard, but it's better to err on the side of too much ventilation in a coop than too little.

That said, you do have to consider strong winds, particularly in the colder months. That's why Britt and I crafted Roman shade-like curtains out of painter's drop cloths for all of the coop's windows. It was quite inexpensive and fairly easy to do, particularly if you strategically use the hems already sewn into the drop cloths. These curtains will give our ladies a refuge from the cold winds – protecting the exposed areas of their bodies (combs, wattles, and feet).



Here are a few other things to note about the front elevation of our coop:

- Again, the entire area is covered in hardware cloth. I could have used chicken wire on the top (bottom needs hardware cloth to keep out critters), but I had enough hardware cloth and I thought it looked better for the entire area to be consistent.
- The height of the walls are 6.5', which is plenty high (for me at least) to be able to walk through the door, and there is plenty of height inside, since there's no ceiling (just the rafters and tin roof above).



- 24" doors were constructed out of pressure-treated wood and painted the same color as the doors of our home.
- To clean things up a bit and to cover up where the pieces of hardware cloth met, I added 1" trim on the outside of each 2"×4" and painted it and the siding of the rest of the coop the same color gray as our home.



- We used gate latches as handles. If you do as well, make sure you make it so that you won't get locked in when the doors close. To do that, I simply drilled a hole just above the latch and attached a long, thin chain that I threaded through the hole, allowing me to open the latch from inside. Don't use string or twine...I found that out the hard way. String will wear out and break, leaving you stranded inside. Fortunately when it happened to me, one of my girls was within shouting distance.
- We were running out of hardware cloth when we were finishing the gable, so we simply filled in the middle space with a board and painted it gray and eventually mounted a set of mule deer antlers there.



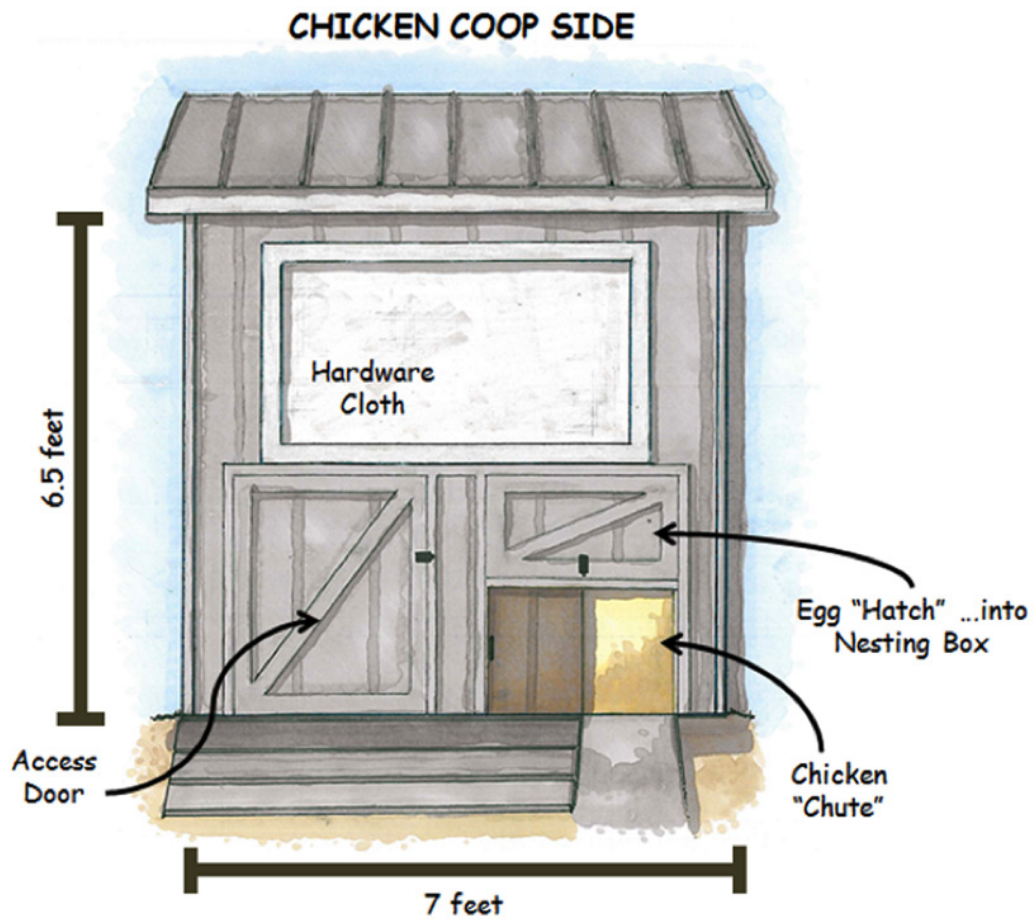
Overall, we're really pleased with this front elevation, and it's done what we needed it to do—make a more than livable space for our chickens (and bunny), while still being attractive.

Right Side Elevation of the Coop

This is the side of the coop where we retrieve the eggs, have another point of access to clean things out, or just peek in to check on our feathered friends.

- The top half of this side of the coop is almost entirely a window of hardware cloth (approximately 33" x 53"). The trim is made of 1"x 3" boards, painted the same color white as the trim on our house.
- I used the same gate latches as I did on the front for the doors.
- To keep the egg hatch from falling down when opened, my oldest daughter had the simple, but great idea to simply add a loop of string tied to the hardware cloth of the window above to hook the latch when opened. This allows us to use both hands when retrieving the eggs.



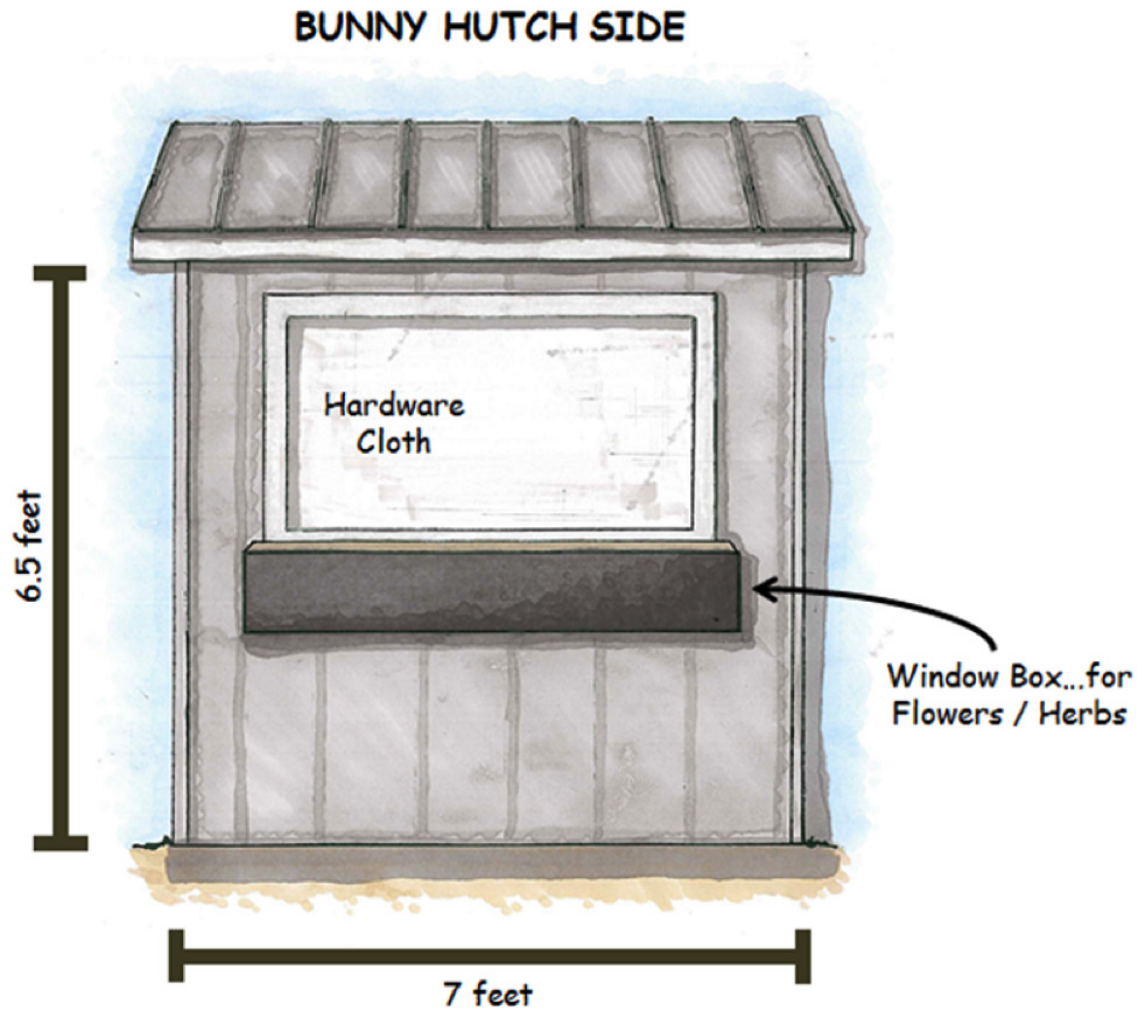


- The access door and egg hatch are constructed of the same siding that I used for the other sides of the coop, framed and reinforced with 1"x 3" boards, and again, painted the same color gray as our house.
- Below the egg hatch is the chicken chute that leads to the run. Originally, I had planned on opening/closing access to the chute every day, but now I only close it when I want to isolate the ladies in the coop or the run to fix something or clean them out.
- Originally we only had pine straw outside the coop and between it and the chicken run. After a rain it would get pretty muddy, and since we were walking back there quite a bit to get the eggs every day, I ended up adding a little walking platform made of decking boards painted a darker gray—the same color of our back deck.



Left Side Elevation of the Coop (actually, of the Bunny Hutch)

This is actually the bunny hutch side of our coop. Nothing much to say here, other than there's the same sized window as on the right side, but since we don't have all the other stuff going on for the bunnies, I added a large black window box.

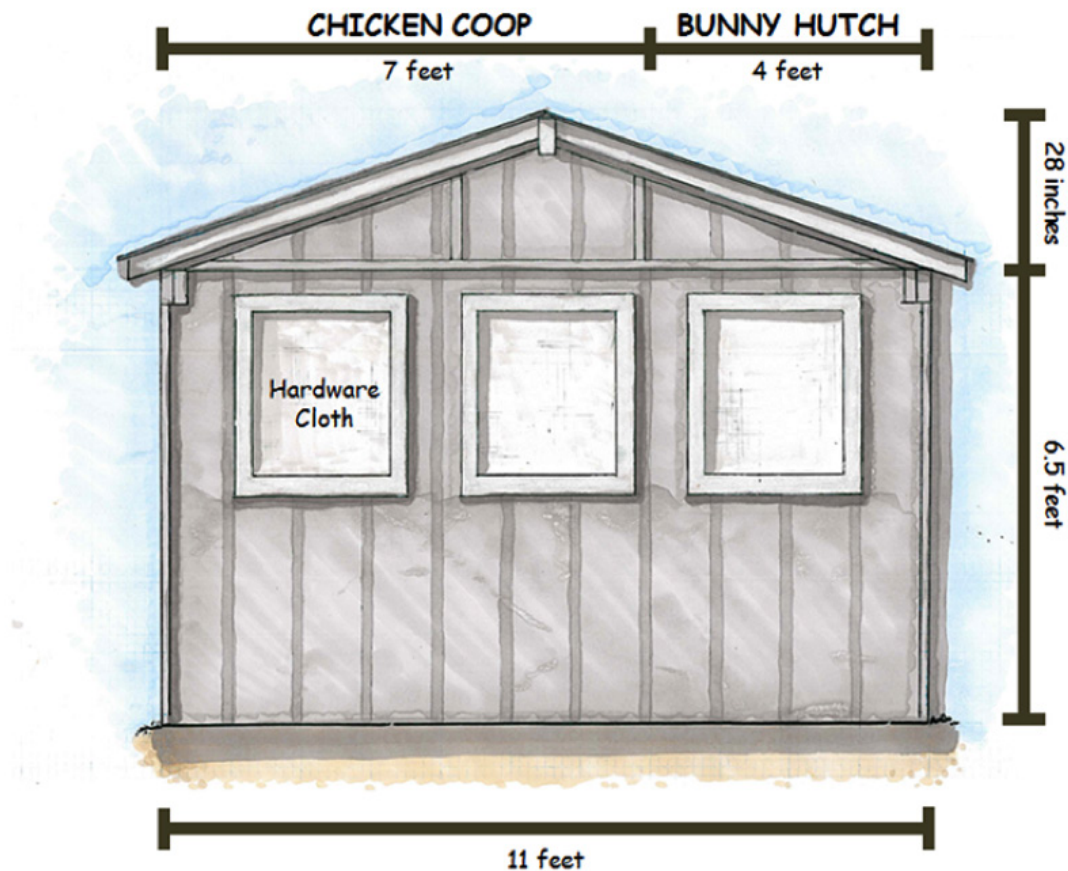


Having the window box gives me the opportunity to soften the space with plant material. Last year I planted a variety of annuals, but this year I'm thinking of planting herbs. Although this may drive our bunny crazy, it will be another place we can grow food, and it will also provide a nice scent to combat the stank of the chickens and bunny during the heat of the summer. I've also heard that the scent of certain herbs (e.g., lavender) lulls flies a bit.



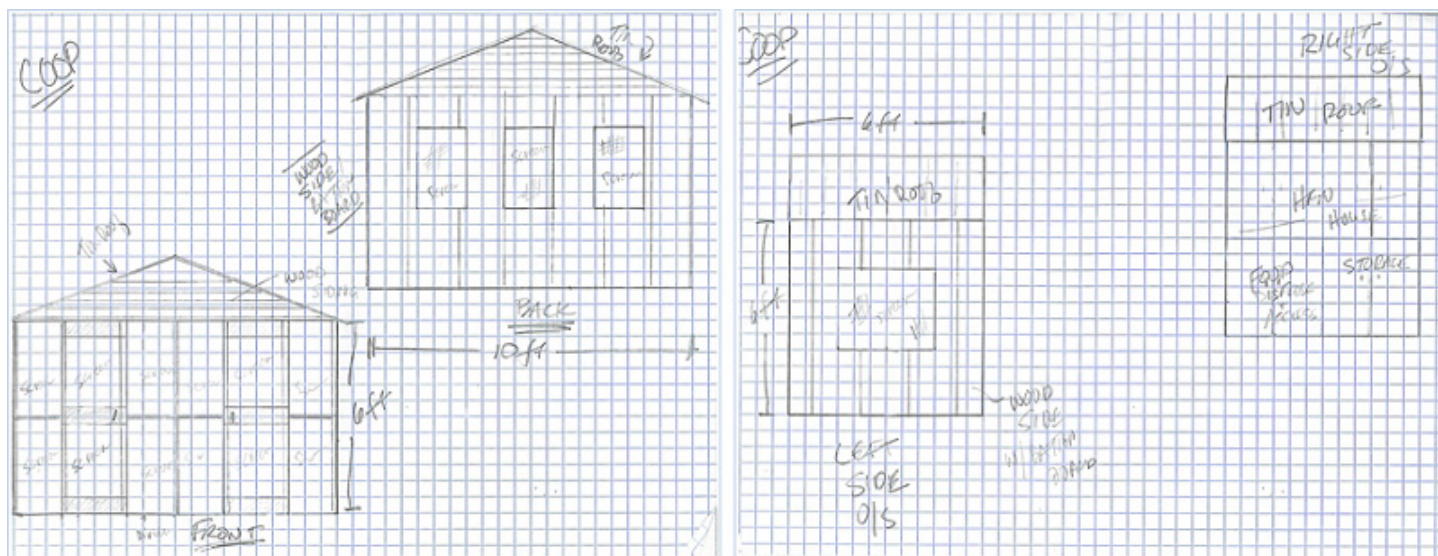
Rear Elevation of the Coop

Again, nothing much to say here. As with the rest of the coop, I used pressure treated siding, painted gray. Then for purposes of ventilation and keeping a symmetrical design, I added three 24"x 33" windows trimmed out and painted like the others.



Before I conclude I want to make sure that you don't think that you have to have fancy plans or drawings to create a great home for your chickens. Sure, you need to have a general idea, but you can do that in a matter of minutes with a pencil and a piece of paper.

Here is what I started with. As you can see, they are very rough sketches. Once we got started, some of the dimensions and elements were tweaked a bit, but we knew directionally where we were going, flexing when we needed to.



Ultimately, we may be a bit too particular on some of the design points, but I really think having an attractive coop in a nice setting has made raising chickens not only sustainable, but more enjoyable. You can always build a coop that is purely functional, but if it looks like a hunk of junk, is that really something you want to see every day? We didn't think so.

It feels a little awkward to conclude something like this, so we'll just wish you well on your chicken adventure. May you have your fill of eggs and find a whole new extension of your family in your feathered friends!



Resources for the Backyard Chicken Keeper

My very first go-to for anything chicken is to check in with Lisa Steele at **Fresh Eggs Daily®**. Not only will you find everything you're looking for...really, everything & more...but Lisa shares in way that's so practical and down-to-earth that you really will feel like you know what to do next.

And it's no surprise that Lisa has such a wealth of knowledge...she's a 5th-generation chicken keeper and has raised almost any kind of chicken you can think of. Besides that...she's written several books, is a regular contributor to many chicken and farming related magazines, has appeared on numerous television shows, and has won several blog awards. Oh...and if that's not enough, she's an herbalist. So you can be confident that her advice is sound and is coming from a very natural, healthy approach.

Can you tell I'm a huge fan? Well I am!

Anyway, here are the links to some of the posts on Fresh Eggs Daily® that I've found most helpful:

- **Fresh Eggs Daily®** — Lisa's main landing page.
- **Chicken Care Guide** — An index of Lisa's most popular posts, organized in a very intuitive way.
- **Basic Chick Care** — All you need to know about caring for your chicks.
- **Introducing New Members to Your Flock** — What you need to be aware of when bringing home new pullets or adult chickens to add to your existing flock.
- **What Breed Should I Choose?** — A very helpful post on choosing the right breed of chicken for you and your family.
- **Chicken Coop Guide** — What you should consider when building or choosing a coop.



- **Chicken Feed Guide** — A quick reference guide for what you should or could be feeding your chickens...from chick to laying hen.
- **Handling and Storing Eggs** — A must-read for anyone raising chickens for eggs, and that's most of us right?
- **To Heat or Not to Heat Your Coop?** — Sound advice to this age-old debate.
- **The Deep Litter Method** — An efficient way to keep your coop clean, while keeping your chickens warm and getting a head-start on your composting efforts.
- **All-Natural First Aid Kit** — A listing and explanation of the 14 essential items you should have on-hand to handle your flock's health needs...and being all-natural, you minimize the side effects that typically come from commercial products.
- **Predator Guide** — Nobody wants to think about predators, but they're a reality...so prepare yourself by reading this post.

Okay...so if that's not enough and you really want to dive into a good book about raising chickens, here are a few recommendations:

- **Chicken's As Pets: The Definitive Guide to Keeping Chickens as Pets** — by Andrew Hinkinson
- **Backyard Poultry Naturally: A Complete Guide to Raising Chickens and Ducks Naturally** — by Alanna Moore
- **Fresh Eggs Daily: Raising Happy, Healthy Chickens** — Naturally, by Lisa Steele (I know...another resource from Lisa, but I couldn't resist!)

I hope these resources are helpful as you start the adventure of raising backyard chickens of your own. And please reach out through **RYGblog** if you have any questions or need anything else.

